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ABSTRACT

As part of the federal government's war on poverty, Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed to provide financial assistance to local education agencies serving areas with high concentrations of children from low-income families. This digest explores the implementation of Title I from its beginnings as the first and largest attempt to provide federal money for education to its current place in the whole school reform effort. Although anti-poverty remains Title I's primary goal, its dominant policy objectives have broadened from fiscal accountability to improving the quality of instruction and achievement in Title I schools. The latest phase of development of Title I has been shaped by competing visions of how to raise student performance, including whole school reform, district-based support, and voucher programs. After describing fragmentation versus schoolwide reform, the report presents an example of schoolwide Title I implementation in Minneapolis. It also describes Title I and the Improving America's Schools Act and examines competing approaches to raising student performance in Title I schools (adopting externally designed models that have been proven effective; shaping Title I schools with district wide support and sanctions to raise academic standards, improve professional development, and make adequate yearly progress; and using educational vouchers). (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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TITLE I AS A REFORM STRATEGY IN URBAN SCHOOLS

As part of the federal government's "War on Poverty," Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed to provide financial assistance to local education agencies serving areas with high concentrations of children from low-income families. The intent was that those agencies would expand and improve their educational programs that contributed particularly to meeting the special needs of educationally disadvantaged children (U.S. Congress 1965, Sec. 201). This digest will explore the implementation of Title I from its beginnings as the first and largest attempt to provide federal money for education to its current place in the whole school reform effort.

Three Phases in Title I Policy

Although addressing poverty remains the primary intent of Title I, its dominant policy objectives have broadened over time. The first two decades of Title I policy focused primarily on fiscal accountability. The federal government required states and districts to use federal money only on schools with the highest concentrations of poverty; to spend as much money on these schools as on schools not receiving federal education dollars; and to use Title I funds only as a supplement to local spending and not for general operating functions. Many states and districts found these federal requirements burdensome. By the 1980s, however, the cooperation between the federal government and local authorities brought about an easing of tight regulations and audits. This, in turn, focused attention on improving the quality of instruction and student achievement in Title I schools. The latest phase in the development of Title I has been shaped by competing visions of how to raise student performance, including whole school reform, district-based support, and voucher programs.

Fragmentation versus Schoolwide Reform

One aspect of Title I that received particular attention was its use of "pullout" programs, in which students were taken out of regular classrooms in order to receive specialized instruction. This fragmentation of school services helped schools comply with fiscal accounting requirements, but it was counterproductive in meeting the educational needs of disadvantaged students. Further, school environments with a high proportion of poor students created concentration effects wherein both poor and non-poor students had a disproportionate educational disadvantage (Wilson, 1987; Kennedy, Jung, & Orland, 1986).

To reduce fragmentation, address ineffective programs, and develop the overall capacity of Title I schools, Congress approved schoolwide Title I programs. In 1988, the Hawkins-Stafford Amendments required the coordination of Title I (called Chapter 1 at that time) with regular instructional programs and allowed schoolwide programs in schools that had at least 75 percent of the students falling below poverty level. Title I schoolwide funding frequently supported:

- hiring additional staff to reduce class size and strengthen the relationship between the schools and families;
- facilitating district activities to promote parental involvement;
- implementing or significantly strengthening teacher training in reading/language arts and mathematics instruction (Schenck & Beckstrom, 1993);
- significantly strengthening components related to curriculum and instruction, such as computer assisted instruction, supplemental education, provisions for extended school days and programs such as "Reading Recovery" and "Success for All" (Schenck & Beckstrom, 1993);
- adopting practices associated with effective schools, including needs assessment, staff development, changes in classroom instruction, and changes in school management (U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

Minneapolis: An Example of Schoolwide Title I Implementation

Research conducted in Minneapolis during the mid 1990s, which compared Title I schoolwide programs with the district as a whole, describes the successes and challenges of improving the effectiveness of schoolwide programs. At the district level in Minneapolis, policies supported schoolwide programs. They granted greater flexibility and programmatic autonomy in high-poverty schools, including efforts toward site-based management that enabled schools to select their own textbooks; increases in local tax revenues to reduce class size; and incentives for the coordination of services between regular and special needs program staff.

At the school site level, variations in instructional practices may explain some of the differences in student outcomes. One successful schoolwide program transitioned from 100 percent pullout for Title I students to collaborative services and team teaching in which the Title I teacher worked in the classroom. Although poor students performed at a lower level than non-poor students, the former group made considerable progress over a four-year period. No significant difference existed in achievement scores between African-American and white students (Wong, Sunderman, & Lee, 1997). Thus, although an empirical need exists to further understand whether schoolwide strategies affect school performance, early nationwide evaluations suggest that, as a group, Title I students in schoolwide programs perform better than their peers who are in the more traditionally organized services such as pullout programs.

Title I and the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA)

With the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), Congress established an ambitious agenda for systemic improvement in Title I schools. Two provisions in this legislation have significant implications for schooling opportunities: (1) district-wide performance standards must apply to all students including those receiving Title I services; (2) schoolwide initiatives are promoted in Title I schools with at least 50 percent low-income students.

Additional federal resources provided under Public Law 105-78 (Obey-Porter legislation, 1997) also facilitate schoolwide reform through support of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD) in Title I schoolwide programs. IASA and Obey-Porter provide a set of legislative expectations that research suggests is essential to any high-functioning school. Based on a national study of thirty-two schools in nine urban and three county-wide districts during 1999-1998, higher performing schoolwide programs show strong implementation of student performance goals, academic standards and assessments, enriched curriculum, student-centered instruction, and evaluation of student performance (Wang, Wong & Kim, 1999).

Competing Approaches to Improving Student Performance in Title I Schools

In the mid-1990s, highly visible partisan politics revealed deep contentions over the degree of funding for and of services provided in redistributive educational programs (Wong, 1999). Title I survived budgetary retrenchment, but in the new climate of outcomes-based accountability, its effectiveness has increasingly been called into question. From a broader perspective, three directions emerged in charting the future of Title I.

One direction is for Title I schools to adopt externally designed models (or CSRD models) that are proven to have been effective elsewhere. Evaluation of the first phase of CSRD reform has been mixed and more empirical studies are needed. One study observed that few reform models have substantiated their claims with hard evidence and that schools have adopted approaches without taking local circumstances into full consideration. Further, only three of the twenty-four whole school reform approaches revealed strong evidence of positive effects. However, several case studies have identified effective strategies (Berends, et al., 2001; Bodilly & Berends, 1999; Stringfield et al., 1997).

A second direction is to shape Title I schools with district-wide support and sanctions that require schools to raise academic standards, to make "adequate yearly progress," and to improve professional development. Chicago school districts have adopted a sanction/support strategy that has improved overall conditions and that has led to better student performance across the system (Wong, 2000; Hill et al., 2000). With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states and districts are moving toward developing a system of support for low performing schools.

Finally, vouchers have been suggested as a way to reform Title I. Parents would decide whether their chosen schools meet their preferences and expectations. Dollars would follow the students, thereby creating competition, pressuring schools to improve, and possibly leading to the closure of failing schools. In short, Title I would become a "portable" voucher program that would follow students even when they enroll in non-public schools (Howell & Peterson, 2002; Walberg, 1998; Ravitch & Viteritti, 1997; Kanstoroom & Palmaffy, 2002). Despite political disagreements, it is increasingly likely that an experimental Title I voucher program will be implemented.

Making Better Use of Title I Resources

Title I has received long term, stable, and bipartisan support but does not constitute "an entitlement" and is increasingly dependent on the academic performance of the schools it funds. A major challenge for Title I policy, then, is to decide where to allocate federal resources in order to have the most positive impact on at-risk students. Using federal money to attract highly qualified teachers to inner-city schools and fill the chronic staffing shortages in science and mathematics would serve to combat poverty concentration effects in urban schools, which primarily serve minority, low-income students. Other effective uses for federal funds involve providing incentives for schoolwide programs to address learning gaps among racial and ethnic groups and teaching disadvantaged students the academic core curriculum in regular classrooms, placing them in heterogeneous groups, and encouraging them to live up to higher academic expectations.

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